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A typology of teacher encounters was derived from observations of elementary school teachers for the purposes of ordering field data and indicating teaching experiences outside the classroom which affect, through sociocultural forces, classroom teaching behavior. From observations of teacher encounters in the auditorium, faculty room, school grounds, and off-school grounds as well as in the classroom, it is hypothesized that an infrequent encounter of one kind may in its ambiguity strain a teacher's sense of satisfaction more than another. Illustrative of this ambiguity which can be perceived as a dichotomy (such as professional-bureaucratic or authoritarian-democratic), are teacher evaluations and parent-teacher relationships. It is postulated that role expectations have obscured or oversimplified research and that inquiry into the dichotomies of teaching will lead to more useful research and, because they reflect and reinforce values attached to teaching, provide reassurance that our research endeavors are consistent with our values. (LP)

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TEACHER ENCOUNTERS: A TYPOLOGY FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON THE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The typology discussed here represents one approach to an ethnographic study of the teaching experience. It provides a way of ordering data acquired through naturalistic observations and interviews, and points up the occupational complexities of teaching. The source of the data is a case study of an elementary school, one of several comparative studies aimed at explicating the teacher's role in traditional and innovative schools. The key concept is that of the teacher's significant encounters with other persons (e.g., pupils, colleagues, parents, principal), which may take place within or outside the classroom.

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Introduction

Teaching has been variously represented as an effective dialogue between personal and established knowledge, interpersonal influence aimed at changing behavior, cultural transmission, an art, a system of action, decision-making. The list is perhaps inexhaustible, bounded only by the limits of our inventiveness in thinking about the substance of teaching. The value of any single conceptualization lies in the theoretical and research implications to which it points.

Extant research on teaching has generally and by design been addressed to discrete aspects of teacher behavior, teacher characteristics, or the organizational context of teaching; the sum of the results does not encompass the complex, culturally structured teaching experience.[1] Furthermore, the source of much of the data about the teaching experience traditionally has been the teacher's classroom performance. The data collected are usually ordered according to one of many schemas along a continuum from very discrete segments of time or behavior to relatively holistic, nondiscrimi-

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[1]The nomenclature of pedagogy is descriptively inadequate. Neither "teaching" nor "teacher behavior" circumscribes the phenomena which are the concern of this discussion. "Teaching experience" is used here to refer to the content of the teacher's role in all its routine and unpredictable manifestations.

nating renditions of what is observed.[2] The required, routine, and self-contained characteristics of the classroom make teacher behavior in that setting relatively accessible to such research.

The extensive and increasingly refined research on teacher classroom behavior has added immeasurably to our understanding of what teachers actually do and say in the classroom, but it does not adequately instruct us as to the complexities of the teaching experience. In our culture this experience is characterized by a value system or ideology which often bears little relationship to the persistent patterns of behavior functional to school routine. To speak of discrepancies between reality and ideality may be simply to make a commonplace observation about imperfectly realized goals--a condition that characterizes most, if not all, professions and institutions. But although the disparity between reality and ideality is not peculiar to the teaching experience or to educational institutions in general, it is comparatively more acute and complex because of the central, culture-affirming role schools and teachers perform. For the teacher such a disparity manifests itself as ambiguous occupational demands.

The research which documents ambiguity in the teaching experience is

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[2]For an extensive review of this and other aspects of research on classroom interaction, see Bruce J. Biddle and Raymond S. Adams, An Analysis of Classroom Activities, Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Center for Research in Social Behavior, 1967, pp. 45-73. The authors identify four major units of analysis: (a) arbitrary units of time, generally used in conjunction with some system of behavioral categories; (b) selected, naturally occurring units, in which the focus is on the behavioral categories such as control incidents; (c) analytic units, based on concepts employed by the investigator, which may or may not be seen as a "natural" unit, e.g., a move, an episode, a teaching cycle, a strategy; (d) phenomenal units, defined by the authors as "'natural-appearing' breaks in the stream of classroom processes that may reasonably be assumed to be recognized by classroom participants."

compounded of varied but familiar theoretical formulations, e.g., studies of role conflict and student subcultures, of teaching styles and classroom climate, of organizational processes.

Use of the professional-bureaucratic model to describe and analyze the operation of the school and the experience of the teacher offers a perspective on ambiguity. The process of becoming a professional is characterized both by loosely defined, erratically applied provisions for evaluation of professional growth (e.g., observation and supervision of the teacher during the probationary period) and by mechanical, relatively meaningless, administrative provisions for recognizing the achievement of professional status (e.g., tenure). The teacher is left to her own resources to recognize and affirm professional advancement.

The authoritarian-democratic dichotomy also offers a perspective on ambiguity. The dichotomy represents two ends of a continuum. A teacher may come to understand that her style of interaction with pupils will not remain static but will fluctuate as a function of general responsibilities, particular activities, and specific pupil behavior. Because, however, the culture's value system has a strong democratic orientation and because the teacher's role in American society is essential to teaching commitment to this value system, teachers are more sensitive to the dichotomy than to the continuum. Since any dichotomy only very inadequately describes behavioral alternatives in the classroom, this aspect of the teaching experience is also ambiguous.

These kinds of ambiguities have led this writer to view teaching as an occupation characterized by a fragmented articulation with its socio-cultural context. The teacher must evolve in relative isolation her own

adaptive responses to all levels of her occupational experience: ideological, organizational, and interpersonal. Furthermore, the arena of this experience is not simply the traditional, self-contained classroom. There are for the teacher significant events and relationships located outside the classroom. These are often disparate and unpredictable, not easily subsumed under a single construct, and certainly not conveniently amenable to systematic research designs. Consequently teacher responses to their occupational world, the significance and priorities they assign to the events and relationships of this world, and the mechanisms they employ to cope with it are research questions for which anthropological field studies are particularly germane.

This article presents a typology of teacher behavior which is appropriate to ethnographic research on teachers and schools. The typology utilized is that of <u>teacher encounters</u>. These interpersonal interactions are seen as varying, both in substance and significance, according to (a) the <u>activity</u> which provides a basis for the encounter, (b) the particular <u>population</u> which creates the social dimensions and dynamics of the encounter, and (c) the physical <u>setting</u>, including material resources, in which the encounter takes place. The encounter is viewed as a "natural-appearing" unit of interpersonal interaction which constitutes <u>for the teacher</u> a recognizable element in her occupational world. The unit is employed to identify, analyze, and compare both the classroom and extra-classroom experience of the teacher. The encounters are presented here according to their setting, i.e., the classroom, the auditorium, the faculty room, the school grounds, and off-school grounds. Within each setting encounters are differentiated primarily in terms of the activity.

The utility of this typology is being explored within the context of a case study of an elementary school. The study is concerned with both the life of the school and the nature of that "community" defined geographically by the school's attendance boundaries. Within the life of the school, the primary research interest is the identification and analysis of the central, persistent demands of the teaching experience. The part of the case study discussed here represents one kind of systematic approach to examining what is surely an increasingly important and immensely complex instrumental role in our culture.

The data and observations described and presented are based on a study of a school (grades K-6) located in a rapidly growing, sprawling, suburban industrial community. A majority of the school's constituency lives in pleasant but somewhat crowded housing tracts and can be characterized as lower middle class. The school is located in the most rural but rapidly changing section of the community. Much of the land within the school's attendance boundaries is still zoned for agriculture, but only a very small percentage of the school children come from farm families. The school reflects the growth patterns of its environs. During the past year, enrollment rose from 390 to 520 pupils and brought with it both predictable and unanticipated problems.

Encounters in an Elementary School

A majority of encounters take place in the classroom, and the basis for most of them is a particular subject matter activity.[3] The daily

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[3]Classroom encounters cannot be consistently equated with subject matter lessons because within a lesson there may be a change in activity, structuring new relationships between teacher and students and imposing new demands on the teacher.

schedule of the first grade in this school is a familiar one:

8:45-9:35	-	Reading
9:35-9:45	-	Recess
9:45-10:45	-	Arithmetic (30 min.)
		Social Studies (30 min.)
10:45-10:55	-	Recess
10:55-11:45	-	Language Arts
11:45-12:30	-	Lunch
12:30-2:00	-	Art, Music, Physical Education,
		Science, Miscellaneous
2:00-2:10	-	Recess
2:10-3:00	-	Reading

The unique characteristics of each subject matter are important structuring influences in the encounters teachers experience. Although some teachers manage to subordinate even gross differences in subject content to a single pedagogical approach, generally the kind of encounter a teacher has while teaching reading is different from that experienced while teaching science or art. Furthermore, quite apart from the nature of the subject matter, the teacher's own predilections, and the characteristics of the class, there are factors external to the classroom which directly affect the encounter. This school district's policy on reading is an example. To insure a better teacher-pupil ratio for this activity, the district set up a staggered reading schedule for the primary grades. One half of each class reported for reading during the first period, with their school day ending at 2:00 p.m.; the other half came for the second period and stayed until 3:00 p.m. The first period reading encounter was,

according to the testimony of the primary teachers and my own observations, a quiet, productive period relatively undemanding with respect to problems of classroom management. Instead of 25-30 pupils, there were 12-15. These 15 were subdivided into slower and faster reading groups. Generally, while one group participated in a reading circle at the front of the room, the other group had a workbook assignment at their desks. They exchanged places at the middle of the period.

This kind of encounter, limited to the first and last periods of the day, was markedly different from most of the subject matter encounters experienced during the rest of the day. It differed, for example, from the first half of the arithmetic lesson, when the teacher demonstrated a new procedure to the entire class or worked through a type of error common to the most recently assigned homework papers. It differed from the second half of the arithmetic period, when the teacher started the pupils on a workbook assignment and then moved about the room checking papers, pressuring pupils to work, disciplining the recalcitrant or indifferent.

Within the period of time devoted to arithmetic each day, approximately 30-40 minutes, these teachers thus experienced two encounters. These particular encounters did not vary in their population; in both cases the entire class was present. In both cases the physical setting, the classroom, was the same. There were only minor variations in the resources utilized, i.e., in the first half the primary tool was the blackboard, in the second half, the text and workbooks. (Within a school teachers will vary, of course, in the resources they exploit; some are unusually adept at both creating and scavenging. Others use only what the district assigns and/or makes available. Such differences are not necessarily predictive of

competence.) The two encounters are most differentiated according to the activity which the teacher chose to undertake. In the first instance, she is engaged in explaining-demonstrating behavior and is at the front of the room requiring the entire class to attend to her behavior. In the second instance she is engaged in guiding-supervising behavior, and moves about the room to keep pupils involved in the operation.

Aside from variations in the utilization of resources and in modifications of the physical organization, the setting of classroom encounters is fixed. There are significant but infrequent variations in the population of a classroom encounter, as for example in an "open house" for parents, when the teacher is in the room to meet parents and discuss the school program. It is, however, the activity in classrooms which creates the most variation, as the following abbreviated list of classroom encounters may suggest:

A. Classroom

1. Art period: Pupils are at work on different projects; teacher supervises and helps individuals.
2. Opening exercises: Teacher stands by as class officer leads the pledge to the flag.
3. Classroom observation: Principal appears and sits in the back of the room as the teacher conducts the class.
4. Story hour: Pupils are seated about the teacher at the front of the room as she reads.
5. Class party: Teacher assumes a subordinate role as mothers bring and serve refreshments.
6. Show and tell: Teacher sits in the back and supervises

presentations by pupils.

7. Spelling test: Teacher is at the front of the room giving out spelling words.
8. End of the day: Parent comes by the classroom for a hurried conference while picking up child.
9. Post school year work day: Teachers clean out their rooms.

Encounters which take place outside the classroom and which involve variations in activity and population include the following:

B. Auditorium

1. Library period: Teachers bring pupils to return and check out books.
2. Parent-Teachers Association meeting: Most teachers are in attendance but not often participating.
3. Christmas program rehearsal: Various classes are gathered in the auditorium; teachers are supervising behavior and directing the rehearsal.

C. Faculty Room

1. Faculty meeting: Principal is in charge; all teachers are in attendance.
2. Lunch: Most teachers eat lunch in the faculty room. There are staggered lunch periods for primary and intermediate teachers. Playground is under non-teacher supervision.
3. Recess: A number of teachers are there for coffee and talk.

D. School Grounds[4]

1. Recess: One or two teachers have playground duty.
2. Physical education: Teacher supervises exercises and organized games for her class.
3. End of day: Each teacher periodically supervises bus-loading operation.

E. Off School Grounds

1. Pre-school orientation: New teachers attend barbecue given by local chamber of commerce.
2. District workshop during school day: Teachers participate according to subject matter area. Substitutes are provided and teachers are required to attend.
3. District workshops after school: Most teachers participate. Attendance is expected but not required.
4. Graduate courses in education: Teachers attend at night or in the summer. Units earned fulfill salary increment requirements.

Over fifty different kinds of encounters have been identified, each of which teachers experience in varying degrees. About each encounter a number of relevant questions can be asked. How often does the encounter occur? What specific decisions does it demand of the teacher and what degree of freedom (from the administration, from colleagues, from parents) does the teacher have in making the decision? To what extent and in what

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[4]Additional settings for teacher encounters at the school include: the principal's office, the school office, and the mimeograph room.

way is it supportive of the teacher's classroom management responsibilities? What expertise does it require? What physical activity is involved? What importance does it have to the teacher in terms of job satisfaction? How does a teacher perceive its importance to significant others?

The answers to these and other relevant questions can be obtained in part through observations and questionnaires. Many of the protocols can be developed, however, only through interviews, and these preferably at the end of the day, when the encounters can be reviewed and discussed with the teachers. This routine was being explored toward the end of the last school year, but there are obvious obstacles of time and convenience, especially for married teachers with young children who have been deposited at a nursery during the day. A full day of observations preceding each interview made possible a compilation of encounters the teacher experienced that day. At the outset of the interview the teacher was provided a list of the encounters. The forced-choice, polarized responses furnished data which together with field notes constituted a basis for subsequent interviews at a more convenient time. There follow, as an example, portions of a protocol from an interview with a fifth-grade, inexperienced, male teacher:

	Most	Least
1. Which activity was in general most/least satisfying to you as a teacher?	Arithmetic. The children were accomplishing something.	History. It was bad. I wasn't prepared.
2. Which activity carried on outside the classroom was most/least satisfying?	Grading papers at lunch.	Recess. I didn't get much done.

	Most	Least
3. Which classroom activity required the most/least preparation?	History. It usually does.	Reading the story about Coronado.
4. During which activity was the behavior of the pupils most/least acceptable?	Spelling. They like that game.	History. They were bored.
5. With which activity do you think the principal would be most/least pleased with your performance?	Arithmetic. I accomplished something.	I am not sure--perhaps general discipline.
6. With which activity do you think your colleagues would be most/least supportive of your performance?	Arithmetic.	Reading, because I was least pleased with it myself.
7. Which activity do you think parents would consider most/least important?	Spelling or arithmetic.	History.
8. In which activity do you think the pupils were most/least interested?	Spelling and then arithmetic.	History.

Interview, questionnaire, and observational data indicate that encounters vary widely in their significance for teachers. A single, infrequent encounter of one kind may in its ambiguity strain a teacher's sense of job satisfaction and professional commitment more than another kind of encounter experienced each day. To illustrate this possibility, two facets of the teaching experience will be briefly discussed: teacher evaluations and parent relationships.

Teacher Evaluations

Typically, new teachers in a school district must serve three years in a probationary status, at the end of which they are granted tenure--assuming their performance has been judged acceptable. The three-year probation is required of all teachers new to the district, whether they

are beginning their careers or have ten years of experience. This particular school district requires two formal evaluations each year during the probationary period and one each year after tenure has been granted.

Evaluations generally follow a format issued by the district personnel office. The principal prepares the evaluation, discusses it with the teachers, has them sign that they have read it and accept it or dissent from it, and then forwards it to the personnel office. The evaluations may be based on as many classroom observations as a principal chooses to make. The district encourages extensive observations.

A teacher has to be markedly incompetent not to be rehired at the end of the first year. In this district in 1967-68, more than half of all the teachers, or over 600, were not tenured. Of these, six, or less than 1% were rated unacceptable and persuaded by the district personnel officer to resign at the end of the school year.[5] Persuaded is the correct word because even a first-year teacher who is judged unacceptable is entitled by state law to a hearing which, incidentally, costs the district about $400 (the district has to contract with the state for the services of a state hearing officer). Due process requires that the case against a teacher whose performance is considered consistently unsatisfactory must be based on evidence, i.e., on a convincing file of observations made by the principal. The system creates for the principal a

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[5]These were teachers whose performances were unacceptable but who did not indicate intention to resign. Among those who did resign there undoubtedly were teachers who in the course of the year convinced themselves, or were convinced by a principal, that it was to their best interest to resign.

painful ambivalence. At some point in the school year he must contemplate a point of no return and decide that he does not want the teacher on his faculty. He is obliged both to help her improve her performance and at the same time to make sure he has adequate evidence to convince her and the district that she will, in fact, not improve at an acceptable rate.

Since salary increases are based on years of service and units of graduate study earned, evaluation is quite meaningless from the standpoint of promotional sanctions. It appears to do nothing to enhance the prestige of teaching as a profession. The question of how competent the teachers feel the principal is to evaluate teaching is germane. It is likely that teachers will seldom be in a position to judge the principal as a classroom teacher. Consequently they must rationalize his competence as an evaluator in terms of his knowledge of and ability to communicate teaching expertise. Interview and questionnaire data reflected some differences among teachers in the school with respect to evaluation and tenure, but the majority indicated tenure would not be difficult to obtain.[6] Hence teacher evaluations have an ambiguous organizational function. They provide a rationale for the principal to intervene and help a teacher improve. From the standpoint of promotional sanctions, however, their function appears to be primarily negative.

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[6]Within a faculty--certainly among these teachers--the explanation for an individual's attitude toward tenure will vary. It may simply be a function of how one assesses the standards of the school and the district in relation to self-assessment. There may also be influential family circumstances, e.g., a female married teacher permanently settled in the community and not financially dependent on her teacher's salary.

This is not to say that teachers, particularly those without experience, aren't sensitive to the process of evaluation and the presence of the principal in the classroom; they are. Regardless of the evaluation process, however, an individual may be a quite indifferent or a markedly dynamic teacher. If the individual chooses to continue as a classroom teacher, competence provides more opportunities for internal organizational benefits, such as a choice of classes and for some informal leadership roles within the faculty and among colleagues in the district, but for little else. (For a male teacher who aspires to an administrative position, the leadership role is significant.) The classroom encounter which initiates the teacher evaluation process is thus characterized by considerable ambiguity.

Parent Relationships

For teachers, encounters with parents represent a wide range of possibilities from highly organized, preplanned, and congenial conferences to abrupt, unanticipated, and conflictive confrontations. District policy establishes the first two days of the Thanksgiving Week as parent conference days in which report cards for the first quarter are issued and reviewed along with the general progress of the pupils. Teachers are responsible for coordinating conference appointments with parents; they report that practically all parents (in most cases, the mothers) respond positively to the opportunity. Teachers feel the conferences are productive. Furthermore, the talks symbolically reaffirm the idealized parent-school-teacher relationship so basic to the value system of education.[7]

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[7]In the brochure issued by the district for parents of elementary school children, the conferences are referred to as "valuable for teachers and parents to know each other and share the insights that each has regarding the interests and capabilities of the student."

At the other end of the continuum are those rare but threatening incidents in which a parent assaults the system and seeks retribution for real or imaginary injustice. These incidents may be pathetic--and threatening only in the sense of being interpersonally awkward, as when in the presence of the kindergarten teacher, a mother "cried for almost an hour" because the teacher recommended that her child not go into the first grade but rather move into a junior first grade as a transitional experience. But an incident may be both emotionally and physically threatening and when publicized consume the attention of the entire staff, as when an irate father rushed into the school in response to a phone call from the secretary asking for a change of clothes for his daughter, who had fallen in a mud puddle during recess. He confronted the secretary in the office area to demand "what the hell kind of a school is it when teachers let this sort of thing happen!" He continued to complain in a loud voice until both classrooms in the vicinity were mesmerized by the disturbance. For the teachers and the secretary, the scene was acutely threatening because the principal was absent at a meeting, and the three male teachers were in portable classrooms distant from the office. Finally, the janitor entered the fray and managed to persuade the man to leave and come back when the principal returned.[8]

Most of the encounters teachers have with parents are mundane.[9] While

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[8]The father didn't come back but called to continue his tirade and eventually to apologize. Several teachers charitably speculated that since he was on the nightshift at a nearby steel mill, perhaps the original call about clean clothes had jolted him out of a prized sleep.

[9]During the course of this study, general observations of and reports by teachers about parent encounters were supplemented by data accumulated during a single month when teachers recorded all contacts they had with parents.

they appear to be routine and logically functional to the operation of the school, they nevertheless frequently assume the character of uneven, inconclusive "negotiations." Aside from notes concerning illness and questions of assignments and make-up work, written communications and personal encounters are generally directed at establishing a child's level of progress and are motivated by concern or worry. Either the parent wants to know what's going on at school or the teacher wants to make sure the parent knows what is going on. In the latter instance, the frequently used device of requiring parents to sign worksheets, tests, and other examples of a child's assigned or completed work is a kind of a quasi-legalistic strategy that for a teacher serves at least one of several purposes. It co-opts the parent into the teaching process (if a parent sees work a pupil has done or has to do, presumably the interaction will facilitate a better performance). It also protects a teacher from accusations of malfeasance in office, such as failure to inform the parent of a child's academic or behavioral problem.

In a public setting, the nature of encounters with parents is more predictable. Parent-teacher meetings and back-to-school nights provide for cursory pleasantries which generally submerge or postpone manifestations of strong vested interests. But the personal and unanticipated encounter represents a call on the teacher's competence and organizational resources and requires that she be prepared to render an accounting.

Discussion

The immediate purpose of this typology is to order field study data on the teaching experience, accumulated primarily through participant observation and interview. Naturalistic observations of teachers *in situ*--

the classroom, the playground, the faculty room--have familiar advantages and problems. They make possible the recording of a rich and diverse range of relevant behavioral phenomena, but their parameters are not explicit. A typology systematizes the data-ordering process.

The typology also explicates the teaching experience. In this discussion it has been argued that the preponderance of research on teaching has focused on teacher behavior in the classroom to the exclusion of significant sociocultural, contextual forces, and conditions which affect how teachers structure their classroom performance and what they invest in it. Many encounters which either present teachers with difficulty in effecting satisfactory closure or help them attach new meaning to their occupation do not embody the stereotypical teaching experience, i.e., the classroom with the teacher at the front, text in hand. Such encounters often occur outside the classroom; they may not involve students.

A third purpose is to raise a question concerning the relationship between the limits of what we know and understand about the teaching experience and the judgments we make with respect to the social utility of particular research projects.[10] We tend to require of educational research that it have recognizable social utility and that it ultimately make some contribution to enhancing the personal commitment and productivity of both teachers and students as participants in the schooling process. Contemporary social problems intensify this concern. At the basis of this typology, however, is the conviction that the role expecta-

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[10]The issue is approached in different ways. Gage and Unruh categorize educational research as either "describing" or "improving." (See N. L. Gage and W. R. Unruh, "Theoretical Formulations for Research on Teaching," Review of Educational Research, July, 1967, 37, 358-370.)

tions and ideals for the teacher in our culture and the degree to which these expectations and ideals inform and structure the kind of research we do on teaching has obscured or oversimplified the nature of the teaching experience. In thinking about teachers and teaching, dichotomous constructs such as authoritarian-democratic and professional-bureaucratic may be useful because of their heuristic value, because they lead into or help to structure useful avenues of research, and because they reflect and reinforce the values we attach to teaching and thus reassure us that our research endeavors are consistent with our values. As logical and natural as this may be, however, we should recognize that semantic or for that matter epistemological questions of educational research at times impede our view of the phenomena we propose to study.